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Sonali Diddi

Colorado State University, [sonali.diddi@colostate.edu](mailto:sonali.diddi@colostate.edu)

Linda S. Niehm

Iowa State University, [niehmlin@iastate.edu](mailto:niehmlin@iastate.edu)

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## Exploring the role of personal values and moral norms towards consumers' intentions to patronize apparel retail brands engaged in Corporate Social Responsibility

Sonali Diddi, Colorado State University, USA

Linda S. Niehm, Iowa State University, USA

Keywords: Moral norms, values, corporate social responsibility

**Introduction:** The global apparel industry contributes significantly to pollution and ecological hazards. Globalization has also contributed to the (un)sustainability of this industry, as apparel companies increasingly outsource production to take advantage of cheap labor (Fletcher, 2008). Due to media attention to these issues, consumers are increasingly taking into account apparel retail brands' socially responsible business practices when making purchase decisions. To address these concerns, businesses have introduced corporate social responsibility CSR policies as an important aspect of their overall corporate strategy (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

**Purpose:** Research pertaining to CSR and its influence on consumer purchase decisions has been conducted in numerous industries including organic food, health, and energy and water consumption (Dodd & Supa, 2011; Dean, Raats, & Shepherd, 2008). However, CSR-related consumer behavior research that is specific to the apparel retail industry is minimal (Gupta & Hodges, 2012). Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the role of consumers' values, norms and attitudes on their patronage intentions towards apparel retail brands engaged in CSR.

**Literature Review:** Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen, 1988) posits that human behavior is a function of behavioral intention, that is formed by the combination of favorable attitudes towards a behavior and a strong normative pressure from significant others. Most of the research using intention models has only included subjective norms (an individual's beliefs about what significant others think he or she should do in a given context), giving much less importance to the concept of personal norms (an individual's belief or perception about what is right or wrong).

Understanding a consumers' value structure provides important insights into what influences their attitudes and intentions to support companies involved in CSR (Basil & Weber, 2006). Of particular interest to this study are Schwartz (1994) self-transcendent values - universalistic and benevolent values. Self-transcendent values incline individuals to choose products that protect the environment, and to take into consideration the welfare of others, including issues related to social justice (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Thus, the present study proposed an extension of the TRA to include moral norms based on personal values. The model outlined positive relationships between universalistic values (UNI), benevolent values (BEN), moral norms (NORM<sub>MORAL</sub>); and subjective norms (NORM<sub>SUB</sub>), attitudes (ATT) and patronage intentions (INTEND).

**Method:** An online survey was used to collect data of national sample of U.S. consumers (age 18 - 87; mean = 43) who were recruited through a market research company. The survey consisted of 27 items from previously tested scales adapted in the ethical decision making context, which also included demographic items (e.g., age). The total number of respondents was 407 (Females = 50.1%, Males = 47.9%).

**Results:** Model testing was done through maximum-likelihood estimation procedures. The measurement model provided a good fit to the data and all measures were within acceptable-to-good fit ranges ( $\chi^2 = 450.725$ ,  $df = 192$  at  $p$  value  $< 0.001$ , CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.04). Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.88 – 0.95. Latent variable structural equation modeling was used to test the hypothesized relationships in the model. Overall fit indices of the hypothesized model indicated a good fit of the model to the data ( $\chi^2 = 502.043$ ,  $df = 199$  at  $p$  value  $< 0.001$ , CFI = 0.976, TLI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.06). The squared multiple correlations ( $R^2$ ) for endogenous variables ranged from 0.11 to 0.41. Based on

standardized path coefficients for the hypothesized model (Table 1) all hypotheses were supported. The results show that consumers' self-transcendent values influence their personal norms that guide their ethical consumption decision making.

Table 1: Hypothesis Testing Results (N = 407)

Hypothesis	Paths	B	t-value
1	UNI $\longrightarrow$ NORM <sub>MORAL</sub>	0.52	12.74**
2	BEN $\longrightarrow$ NORM <sub>SUB</sub>	0.33	6.81**
3	NORM <sub>MORAL</sub> $\longrightarrow$ ATT	0.35	6.70**
4	NORM <sub>SUB</sub> $\longrightarrow$ ATT	0.19	3.65**
5	NORM <sub>MORAL</sub> $\longrightarrow$ INTEND	0.38	7.82**
6	NORM <sub>SUB</sub> $\longrightarrow$ INTEND	0.27	5.74**
7	ATT $\longrightarrow$ INTEND	0.28	5.10**

\*\* $p \leq 0.001$

### Conclusions and Implications:

An important theoretical contribution of this study is that it extends the TRA to include measures of values and moral norms in ethical contexts (Armitage & Conner, 2001, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Findings from this study provide an understanding of the significant roles of universalism values and moral norms in consumers' attitude formation, and patronage intentions for apparel retail brands. Apparel retail brands should integrate CSR related information in their strategic marketing activities to increase consumer awareness of socially responsible business practices, which in turn may enhance their brand image.

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